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comment as was to be found in Mr. Stopford Brooke's recent volume of essays.

BRANDER MATTHEWS.

"VICTOR HUGO'S INTELLECTUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY."*

SHORTLY after the death of Victor Hugo, in 1885, was begun the publication of his posthumous works, the stately volumes falling from the press with a frequency that filled the world with amazement at the productive power of the Titan—an amazement that was quickly succeeded by indifference. Outside of France, the greatest name of nineteenth-century literature fell into a kind of premature semi-neglect rather than semi-oblivion; the rest of the world, frankly speaking, had received more of him than it cared for. What it retained of him was his earlier work, and of this chiefly his prose, which, being translatable, alone could hope for that kind of international popularity which works its way downward among the masses. To-day only "*Les Misérables*" is found there, as is but natural in an age of ever-growing social unrest, but even that classic has been left behind by the spirit of the day. "*Notre Dame de Paris*" still keeps it company, but "*Quatre-vingt-treize*," "*Han d'Islande*," "*Bug-Jargal*," "*L'Homme Qui Rit*" and "*Les Travailleurs de la Mer*" are forgotten.

Hugo's poetry, by far the nobler part of his literary work, has shared among the international few the fate that has overtaken his prose among the international many. It has been relegated to the class-rooms of colleges, and to the library of the special student of French literature. It is not kept in the company of Homer, Shakespeare, Dante, Goethe on the shelf of the lover of immortal literature, a familiar friend to be taken down at odd moments for solace and profit and stimulation. Whatever the ultimate verdict of literary history, the present generation has relegated Victor Hugo to a place in the second rank, because, with all the sonorous majesty of his strophes, the inexhaustible wealth and beauty of his imagery, he lacks a consistent, profound, original philosophy of life—what the Ger-

* "Victor Hugo's Intellectual Autobiography." Translated, with a Study of the Last Phase of Hugo's Genius, by Lorenzo O'Rourke. New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company.

mans so felicitously term a "*Weltanschauung*." It is its content that makes poetry immortal, not mere form, however grandiose, nor adornment, however dazzling. Victor Hugo has been called the Michelangelo of literature by headlong enthusiasts, its Turner by more impartial critics. In the perspective of a quarter of a century, the comparison with Gustave Doré appears to be the most exact of all.

These observations are called forth by the enthusiastic introductory "Study of the last Phase of Hugo's Genius," which Mr. Lorenzo O'Rourke has prefixed to his translation of the poet's "*Postscriptum de Ma Vie*," just published in this country under the title of "Victor Hugo's Intellectual Autobiography." The book, which dates from the exile in Guernsey, was withheld from the public, so we are given to understand, for many years by Hugo's own directions—exactly why, one fails to see. It was issued in France on the occasion of the celebration of the centenary of his birth, in 1902. The work will detract nothing from Hugo's fame, it will certainly add nothing to it. These eleven essays on literature, art, God, religion, the soul and immortality are characteristic of his artistry, of his consummate mastery of the majestic phrase, of his fertile fancy, of his luxuriance of powerful image and arresting metaphor, of his facility of grasping and elaborating the ideas of the moment "in the air," but also of his poverty of deep original thought. The literary essays, which open the volume, are, in the final analysis, but thinly disguised directions for posterity to follow in the formation of its final judgment of the genius of their author—directions pointing to Homer, Æschylus, Dante and Shakespeare, which Mr. O'Rourke has gladly followed. They will be found in the chapters on "Genius and Taste," "Genius" and "The Utility of the Beautiful." The religious and philosophic chapters that follow bear the intellectual stamp of their period, and by it are relegated to the past—the stamp of the middle of the last century, with its religio-evolutionary uncertainties and questionings, long since reconciled in the simplest minds, and laid to rest by the thinking world. Here the absence of vigorous independent thought is most strikingly seen. It is all reflected from without, and throughout visualization takes the place of interpretation, numerous and gorgeous images that of speculation. The whole book is but a last illustration of Hugo's incomparable

gift of phrase-making, of his self-consciousness, his egotism, his reliance upon a superb, but purely external, literary gift, upon a craftsmanship that apparently never was in close communion with its possessor's essential inner self, which, instead, always looked abroad for stimulation to the intellectual, social or political preoccupations of the hour. Victor Hugo sought, first of all, fame, not self-expression. One can apply to him Lowell's characterization of Gladstone as "a gentleman who can extemporize lifelong convictions." He was ever a *poseur*.

He posed, also, as a man of prodigious erudition. Whether he was or no, it would be difficult to decide: there have always been two opinions on the subject. We may safely assume that he thoroughly knew, and loved, and understood, and appreciated Homer, Æschylus, Dante, Shakespeare; that was but part of his craft. But one finds here numerous instances of what can only be described as the scholarly pose. In the essay called "*Pro-montorium Somnii*," for instance, there occurs obscure illustration after obscure illustration of the superstitions of classical antiquity and the Dark and Middle Ages, unknown customs and names never encountered before, and never to be seen again by any but the most specializing of special students. No wonder that the translator occasionally betrays his bewilderment. What are *alungles*, *asproles*, *unguliques*, *spurgeflex* and *voultes*? Hugo, in his large way, does not stop to explain such familiar inventions of mediæval diabolism. And does not "*Berbiguier de Terre-neuve du Thym*" look gorgeously erudite? One is glad to learn that he "used to pass his time in catching demons between two brushes which he would violently rub together." But when one discovers in the end that all this display of learning is lavished, not upon a study of demonology, ancient and Gothic, but upon an elaboration of the quite familiar fact that the superstitions of the Pagan world were not dissipated by Christianity, but survived in far more forbidding, crasser forms, one suspects that it was all "read up" for the purpose, to be forgotten the moment it had served its turn. But, for all that, these pages have the grand manner that distinguishes every line written by this master hand.

Of the remaining contents of the book, little need be said. They are mere sketches that might better have been left unpublished and untranslated. That on "Great Men"—Shake-

speare, La Fontaine, Voltaire, Beaumarchais—is utterly unimportant; from the “Thoughts” that close the volume nothing can be taken worth preserving, except, perhaps, “Change your opinions, keep to your principles; change your leaves, keep intact your roots.” The essay on the French Revolution, a mighty subject, indeed, turns out to be but another image, of a flood of miserable humanity bearing the barge of autocracy on its lacerated bodies, and ultimately dashing it upon the rocks.

A final word about Mr. O’Rourke’s introduction. It is not a study, but an unqualified panegyric, in the spirit of Swinburne’s extravagant homage, and, as has already been said, in that of Hugo’s own complacent, if indirect, suggestions. “He is a primitive genius appearing at a modern period, and confronting the age of science. . . . He is a primitive genius of the Homeric strain,” these are phrases taken bodily from him. Mr. O’Rourke is suggestive when he deals with Hugo’s artistry; he claims too much when he denies all limitations to his talent. He is clear-eyed enough to see, with Swinburne, that “it is as a lyric poet that Victor Hugo has distanced all rivals”; he elaborates very ingeniously the proposition that Hugo saw life, not in colors, but in light and shadow, in black and white; but, when he claims the most exalted inspiration from within as the cause of that “auto-intoxication” which Hugo displays in so much of his poetry and his prose, he enters upon debatable ground. The psychology of Victor Hugo is too complicated, and it has been too little studied thus far to allow of such an offhand decision. Hugo had trained this power of self-intoxication to such a degree that it had become an almost mechanical trick. Hence, in his work, a not infrequent lack of proportion between treatment and theme, ever the one majestic sweep of giant wings, the same soaring at the same great height, however close to earth his subject. A genius he was, but he made the genius serve the craftsman, not the craftsman the genius. Mr. O’Rourke would place him, at his own suggestion, beside Homer, Dante, Shakespeare. Let us leave him, instead, in this period of the neglect that apparently always follows a great writer’s death, and precedes the determination of his definitive place in literature, in the company of two immortals of still uncertain ultimate standing on the mountain-top—Molière and Goethe.

A. SCHADE VAN WESTRUM.